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## Beauty Ratsnakes *(Orthriophis taeniurus ssp.)*

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### Impressive and Beautiful Asian Species

The Beauty ratsnakes consist of several species and subspecies (approximately 10 to 12, depending on taxonomy) of old world rat snakes, many of which are popular and attractive display animals and pets in the herpetoculture hobby. They earn their name of beauty ratsnakes due to the fact that they are a commercially significant group of snakes within their ranges for snake skin based products as well as the trade in live specimens. Some specimens, particularly wild caught individuals, can be irascible and temperamental, although others can become very docile pet snakes to keep and maintain. They are medium sized to large, fairly slender bodied, semi-arboreal to strongly arboreal snakes, and their colors and patterns can vary depending on the species. Ground color can be tan, yellowish, to olive brown, slate gray, or bluish with large, darker irregular spots, to stripes, and/or blotches. There are usually darker ocular stripes on their elongated heads, and the tail usually grading from blotches into striping. They are powerful, and active climbers, often ascending trees, barns, and other outbuildings in search of small birds, eggs, and small mammals. Commonly kept species include the **Chinese Beauty Ratsnake** (*Orthriophis taeniura taeniura*) **Taiwanese Beauty Ratsnake** (*O. taeniurus friesei*), **Vietnamese Blue Beauty Ratsnake** (*O. taenirus callicyanous*) and **Cave Dwelling or Ridley's Beauty Ratsnake** (*O. taeniurus ridleyi*).

### Taxonomy

**Life:** All living, physical, and animate entities

**Domain:** Eukaryota

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum/Sub Phylum:** Chordata/Vertebrata

**Class:** Reptilia

**Order:** Squamata

**Suborder:** Serpentes

**Infraorder:** Alethinophidia

**Family:** Colubridae

**Subfamily:** Colubrinae

**Genus:** Orthriophis

**Species:** *Orthriophis taeniurus*\*

*\*Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

### **Lifespan and Longevity**

If provided the correct care and husbandry, the beauty ratsnakes can achieve longevity of up to 15 to 25 years or slightly more.

### **Distribution and Habitat**

Beauty ratsnakes are a genus of large, arboreal to semi-arboreal Old World ratsnakes which generally range across southern and southeastern Asia, including China, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Malaysia depending on the species and subspecies. These large, active ratsnakes may be found in a variety of habitats depending on the species or subspecies, and can range from semi-arid desert and scrubland, to caves, tropical to sub-tropical forests and woodlands, savannahs, and often around human habitations and agricultural areas and croplands as well.

### **Origin/History**

*Elaphe taeniura* (Cope, 1861); *Orthriophis taeniurus* — Utiger et al., 2002. The several *O. taeniura* subspecies would have other authors first describing them during other years.

The Beauty ratsnake complex of subspecies have long been popular in herpetoculture and the pet trade for many decades, although the exact timing of their first keeping and importation into the U.S. is not known. They became heavily exported snakes in the Chinese meat, skin, and live animal trades their native ranges in Asia. They have been popular since at least the 1970's, and now, captive-bred hatchlings would become commonly available through breeders, reptile expos, and reptile specialty stores.

Wild caught snakes were noted to have difficult dispositions despite being kept as pets for several years, although captive-bred specimens often became more tractable. The Vietnamese Blue beauty (*O. taeniurus callicyanous*) and the Cave Dwelling ratsnakes (*O. taeniurus ridleyi*) would perhaps be among the most sought after of the *O. taeniurus* subspecies or varieties of these Asian ratsnakes.

### **Experience Level Required**

Intermediate/Moderate.

### **Size**

Beauty ratsnakes can range from 8 to 18 inches as hatchlings, and 5 to 9 feet, or 54 to 108 inches as most adults depending on the species and subspecies.

### **Housing and Enclosure**

**Enclosure System: Semi-Arboreal to Arboreal.** Housing must be sealed, secure, and escape proof. Hatchling beauty ratsnakes can be housed in a 20 gallon long or tall terrarium or enclosure. Adult beauty ratsnakes should be housed in a minimum of a 4 to 6 foot by 2 foot long terrarium or enclosure. Beauty ratsnakes are semi-arboreal, and height can be just as important as floor space for this species. Provide a substrate that can enable burrowing or hiding and that retains humidity well such as cypress mulch, orchid bark, or coconut fibers. Do not use pine or cedar shavings, as these substrates are toxic to snakes. Provide additional basking and hiding

opportunities using live or artificial foliage, rocks, logs, branches, driftwood, perches, or other hides. Also be sure to include a sturdy water bowl or dish as well. Additional humid hides can be provided as well for additional humidity.

### **Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity**

Create a thermal gradient (or a warm side) in the cage/enclosure with an appropriate sized UTH (or tank heating pad), ceramic or radiant heat emitter, or incandescent, UVA/UVB, or other heat producing bulb. Ideal temperatures for beauty ratsnakes range from 75 to 85 degrees F on the cool side and 85 to 90 degrees F on the warm side. Most species of snakes have fairly simple and undemanding heating and lighting requirements in captivity, and do not require additional UVA/UVB lighting, although providing it can be greatly beneficial for their health, immune system, and overall wellness. Also be sure to spot clean the enclosure for urates, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Beauty ratsnakes should be maintained at moderate to somewhat high relative humidity levels from about 50 to 80%, depending on the exact species and subspecies, with additional humid hides or retreats to assist with shedding and overall health.

### **Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition**

***Carnivorous;*** In the wild, beauty ratsnakes are carnivorous, and will prey upon rodents and other small mammals, small birds, bird eggs, and other smaller vertebrates. Hatchlings and juveniles will also occasionally eat smaller frogs, lizards, or other reptiles. In captivity, beauty ratsnakes can be given feeder rodents of appropriate size, such as rats or mice. In most circumstances, it is recommended to provide humanely pre-killed rodents acquired from a reputable source, as offering live rodents to any snake can carry risk of serious injury or even death to your snake when the rodent bites to defend itself or otherwise gnaws on your animal. A general rule of thumb when selecting feeder rodent sizes for your snake is to provide prey items that are approximately the same width as the snake's widest point. It should also be noted that many snakes may refuse food for longer periods of time over several weeks or months, especially in the fall and winter months or if several other husbandry conditions are not being met. While this can be alarming to new pet owners, it is oftentimes normal, but their overall health and weight should be monitored during these times to make sure they do not lose weight or otherwise deteriorate. Most snakes typically are fed whole prey items, and do not usually require additional calcium or vitamin D3 supplementation unless otherwise directed. Their feeding frequency will also depend on the age, size, and overall health of your animal. Use care as to not overfeed them, as obesity and other health related issues can become an issue. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

### **Handling**

As with many snakes, hatchling and juvenile beauty rat snakes of most species may initially be nervous and defensive. They may rattle their tails, musk or defecate, or bite when alarmed. Handle them gently and deliberately, but do not drop or injure the animal. There is some variability in temperaments among the beauty rat snakes. Some will become very docile and tolerant of regular handling, while others may remain somewhat aggressive or irascible snakes.

**\*\*Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens\*\***

## **Contact**

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